



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 4/3/2003

GAIN Report #HK3009

Hong Kong

Market Development Reports

Nutrition Labeling Proposed in Hong Kong 2003

Approved by:

Lloyd S. Harbert

U.S. Consulate, Hong Kong

Prepared by:

Caroline Yuen

Report Highlights:

The Hong Kong administration has recently proposed to the Legislative Council its intention to implement a mandatory nutrition labeling system in two phases. In the beginning, suppliers may choose to follow the requirements on a voluntary basis. The scheme will become mandatory after the voluntary scheme has been in place for five to ten years. Voluntary nutrition labeling will become effective no earlier than 2007. According to the proposal, all prepackaged foods will be subject to nutrition labeling.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Hong Kong [HK1], HK

Summary

The Hong Kong administration has recently proposed to the Legislative Council its intention to implement a mandatory nutrition labeling system in two phases. In the beginning, suppliers may choose to follow the requirements on a voluntary basis. The scheme will become mandatory after the voluntary scheme has been in place for five to ten years. Public consultation on this proposal will be launched in the latter half of 2003. Voluntary nutrition labeling will become effective no earlier than 2007. According to the proposal, all prepackaged foods will be subject to nutrition labeling.

Background

Currently Hong Kong does not have any nutrition labeling requirements or guidelines. Its existing labeling regulation applies to all prepackaged foods and requires labels to provide information on product name, ingredients, weight/volume/count, durability, instruction for storage and use, and name and address of manufacturers.

With the intention to begin nutrition labeling, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) conducted a feasibility study on nutrition labeling in 2001/2002. The feasibility study looked into the different international practices in overseas jurisdictions and the labeling guidelines issued by Codex. The FEHD then concluded that Hong Kong should have a labeling scheme on nutritional information and decided to move ahead with a proposal which was recently delivered to the Legislative Council.

The proposal gives a very general framework of Hong Kong's future nutrition labeling requirements. The labeling system will be implemented in two stages. In the initial stage, food suppliers who choose on a voluntary basis to carry nutrition information, nutrition claims and function claims on their products will follow a prescribed format. The government plans to allow the voluntary scheme to run for a period of five to ten years before it will become mandatory for all prepackaged food products. The purpose of having a voluntary scheme in the beginning is to allow food suppliers to get familiarized with the new regulations.

According to the proposal, the labeling scheme on nutrition information will be defined as the quantitative listing of nutrient values of a food. The label will list out a set of core nutrients such as energy, protein, carbohydrate and fat. The level of nutrients should be expressed as absolute amount (in metric units) per 100 g or 100 ml of food.

The proposal allows nutrition claims but these claims are restricted to a set of core nutrients to be prescribed by the FEHD. For example, nutrient claims of "high calcium" or "low fat" must contain a minimum or maximum level of that specific nutrient on the label. Comparative claims such as "Reduced fat - 25% less than the regular product of the same brand" must specify on the label the minimum difference in nutrient content between the compared foods.

The proposal also provides guidelines on nutrient function claims such as calcium aids in the development of strong bones and teeth. FEHD plans to allow only those nutrients that are included in the list provided by the Codex guidelines to be the subject of function claims.

Drafting of the regulation has not yet started. FEHD is planning to launch a public consultation on the proposal on nutrition labeling in the coming months. The pace of legislation depends very much on the outcome of the consultation and the response of the food industry. Once the regulation goes into effect, it will provide 18 months' grace period for the industry to comply with the changes. To this end, the earliest that voluntary nutrition labeling will become effective will be 2007, with a mandatory system in place after five to ten years later.